

IL-TORŌBO

PART I

BRING SOME NOTES ON THE VARIOUS TYPES OF DOROBO:¹ 101
FOUND IN THE MASAI RESERVE OF TANGANYIKA TERRITORY 124
AND CONTIGUOUS DISTRICTS

THE name Dorobo is a familiar one to almost every European in East Africa to-day. Nevertheless, beyond the fact that the Dorobo are commonly supposed to be a nomad tribe or clan of hunters living for the most part with, or near to the Masai, little would appear to be known about them. The Dorobo are referred to in many ethnical works of comparatively recent date, and they are mentioned in a number of books on African sport and travel, but I am unaware of any published work purporting to deal exclusively with these interesting people.

The following very incomplete notes on the Dorobo of 121
Tanganyika Territory have been compiled from various
sources,² but mainly from discussions with the Dorobo them- [24]
selves, throughout Tanganyika Masailand. My chief informant 115 ●
has been "Jumbe" Lekite of the Talamai³ *Il-Mósiro*. The
death of this intelligent old man in July, 1926, deprived me of
much interesting information.

During three years spent amongst the Masai I have had better 114
opportunities than most people of getting to know the Dorobo.
The peculiar conditions obtaining in a Station such as Kibaya,
isolated in the middle of a vast area populated almost entirely

¹ I have called them *Dorobo* throughout, though it may be that certain writers would prefer *Andorobo* or *Wandorobo*. I think it will be agreed that the latter, at any rate, is inadmissible. I have clung to the name without a prefix, as these notes look, perforce, at the Dorobo through Masai eyes and the Masai: *Oi-Torōbōni*, *Il-Torōbo*, when shorn of the article, is prefixless. The initial D has been substituted for T as being more customary to the European ear.

² The authority consulted is quoted in every case.

³ Talamai (or "Kijungu," as it is called by the Wangusi and Wasigusi of Handeni and also by the inhabitants of the small Bantu settlement thereof, mainly Wasukuma) is a range of hills to the north of and overlooking the main Kondoa-Handeni road, about 45 miles east of Kibaya Station. Its map-reference is: C 5; Masai Steppe: L II; d: 3, 4. The name Talamai refers primarily to the hills, whereas Kijungu is the settlement. [33]

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"In spite of the fact that only such a small number of Wanderobo are left to represent this tribe, it would be erroneous to consider that the tribe was never more numerous, and in fact, there were probably several hundreds of families representing more than a thousand people in the not very distant past. The reason for the decrease in their numbers is due, not to extinction, but to absorption, for when the Kikuyu bought their land many Wanderobo families gave up their hunting life and married into Kikuyu families as well as giving their daughters in marriage to the Kikuyu, until in the course of a generation or two they were completely absorbed ...

"... it was the custom of the Wanderobo of the Kikuyu area to live in fairly large villages where their numbers gave them and their families reasonable security from attack, and where they could organise their social life in such a way as to have courts of justice and other amenities of this type".

77. Dorobo Organization

With regard to organization, a Dorobo witness told the Land Commission in a sworn statement: "Like the Kikuyu we had our mbari", but this does not in itself mean very much; an mbari is only an extended family and the extension may be so slight that all we can infer from the remark, if we believe it, is that the family was the unit of the social order. But the same witness, later on in the same statement, said: "Our name 'Mbari ya Choiro' is the name applied to us all, as Kikuyu is the name for all the Kikuyu tribe. Within the Mbari ya Choiro there are other mbari", and this certainly suggests a recognition of the mbari as part of a clan, though the possibility of mere imitation cannot be ruled out.

The following brief account of their tribal organization was given me at a meeting of the Dorobo now living at Keritta on the edge of the Forest Reserve, and subsequently checked with the assistance of two elders, Ruchuba obo Lemwa, who lives on a European farm close to the Forest Reserve (in the Naivasha area), and Gwamba ng'ab Sabaiya, who lives at Keritta.